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Highlights of Secretary McNamara's Testimony to the
Stennis Committee, 25 August 1967

Secretary McNamara presented a strong defense of the bombing program against North Vietnam. He claimed the program had successfully met its limited objectives. He stressed that the bombing program is a supplement and not a substitute for an effective ground campaign in South Vietnam.

He noted that 85 percent of the JCS target recommendations were authorized for strike. The few not authorized were of minor importance or presented risks unacceptable in view of their dubious prospects.

He rejected proposals for escalating the air war -- closing the ports, mining the harbors -- as untenable in terms of their objectives, as being no more fruitful than the present campaign and as involving risks of confrontation with the USSR including the risk of direct Soviet intervention.

The Secretary presented his case by discussing three topics:

I. The Objectives and Achievements of the Air War

a. The air campaign successfully met its objectives:

It has raised morale in the South; put a high price on

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aggression; and has made infiltration more difficult and costly.

b. Complete interdiction of the movement of men and supplies has never been considered possible.

c. The DRV's war making ability is dependent on imports of military goods and moving them South -- the capacity of the transport system is very large and military traffic is very small -- 15 tons a day of traffic in a pipeline with an outlet of 200 tons a day.

d. The DRV has had to divert some 500,000 people to cope with air attacks.

e. The bombing campaign is hurting the DRV's war making capability but no campaign, short of one with population as a target, can force Hanoi into submission.

f. No improvement of the air campaign can do much more than put a high price tag on aggression.

II. The Extent to Which JCS Target Recommendations are Followed

a. There are a total of 427 targets -- strikes have been recommended against 359 and authorized for 302 (85% of the total).

b. Strikes against the 57 targets not authorized will not materially shorten the war.

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c. For the most part these 57 targets are of little importance, and the risks of confrontation exceed the military gains resulting from attack of the few important ones.

d. Attacks on the 57 targets would not gain any different objectives than those we already have.

III. Proposals for Expanding the Bombings

a. The proponents of expanding the bombings would change our objectives: they believe air power can break Hanoi's will or cut off the flow of supplies. They see the air war as a substitute rather than a supplement to the ground war.

b. There is no evidence in intelligence that a new air campaign can break Hanoi's will. It is the course of the ground war rather than the scale of air attack is the determining factor in "breaking the will."

c. A new campaign cannot cut off the flow of supplies -- the capacity of LOCs and external sources of supply so exceeds the minimal flows necessary that they cannot be stopped by air attacks.

d. The closing of sea and land routes would interfere seriously with imports but essential traffic would continue to flow.

e. An expanded air war can achieve no more than our present careful program.

f. An expanded air war would involve risks too high to accept for its dubious prospects.

g. Mining the harbors would be an act of war in the legal sense. Closing the ports could induce a strong and unpredictable Soviet reaction -- ranging from increased material support to direct Soviet intervention in the war.

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